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Bullying, Sex Assault, And Violence Show Recent Declines In New National Youth Survey

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DURHAM, N.H. -- Bullying, sexual assault and other violence against children and youth declined substantially between 2003 and 2008 according to a new national study conducted by the Crimes against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire.

The percentage of children reporting physical bullying in the past year went down from 22 percent to 15 percent, and the percentage reporting a sexual assault decreased from 3.3 percent to 2.0 percent.

"This confirms encouraging trends we have seen in other general crime statistics such as from the FBI and the National Crime Victimization Survey," said lead author David Finkelhor, director of the UNH Crimes against Children Research Center. "But it shows that the improvement applies to children specifically and to a variety of victimization types, both more and less serious."

Finkelhor notes that two of the largest declines, in bullying and sexual assault, were problems that have been aggressively targeted by school programs and other prevention efforts in recent years. "This suggests that some of the decline may be the fruits of those programs," he said.

The study did not find declines in physical abuse and neglect by caregivers, but it did find a decline in psychological abuse. Thefts of children's property also declined, but robbery was one of the few offenses to show an increase.

"The overall level of children's victimization is still shockingly high," Finkelhor said, "but we are making considerable progress. This positive news should inspire people to push forward and expand our current efforts."

The findings were based on two nationally representative samples of children ages 2 to

17, from two similar studies conducted 5 years apart, the Developmental Victimization Survey and the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence, both were funded by the U.S. Department of Justice. They appear in a paper, "Trends in Childhood Violence and Abuse Exposure" co-authored by Finkelhor, Heather Turner and Richard Ormrod of the University of New Hampshire and Sherry Hamby of Sewanee: The University of the South and published in the current issue of the Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine.

Created in 1998, the UNH Crimes against Children Research Center (CCRC) works to combat crimes against children by providing high-quality research and statistics to the public, policy makers, law enforcement personnel, and other child welfare practitioners. CCRC is concerned with research about the nature of crimes including child abduction, homicide, rape, assault, and physical and sexual abuse as well as their impact. Associated with the CCRC is an internationally recognized group of experts who have published numerous books and articles concerning the incidence and impact of violence against children. Visit the center online at <http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/index.html>.

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